

Winter 2013

WILD GOOSE POETRY REVIEW
WINTER 2013

Moment of Reflection

I wonder what the average lifespan of a poetry journal is. This issue, our 24th, marks 6 ½ years for Wild Goose. I'm feeling pretty good about that. This is also my 12th issue as Editor and with the 5 prior issues as co-Editor, my 17th overall. I'm feeling pretty good about that too. Of course, I want to thank Patricia Bostian who started it all off, and those who help out by writing reviews when I have too many to do on my own: Helen Losse, Ann Chandonnet, Nancy Posey, Tim Peeler, Ami Kaye, Bud Caywood. And most of all, I want to thank the wonderful poets (too many to name, but you can see the entire list in the index) who have shared their poems with us, and the wonderful readers who keep coming back and joining in the discussion. Now, on to the Winter 2013 issue.

A Word on the Winter Issue

A couple of years ago I commented on just how much I enjoy arranging the order of poems in an issue of Wild Goose Poetry Review, how much I enjoy noticing thematic, imagistic, and stylistic connections between the selected poems and placing them in a proximity that creates opportunities for comparison, contrast, enrichment, and a sort of poetic discussion. It's still true, and the poems in this issue have a lot of very interesting connections. As you read through, look for a string of poems that deal with loss, and another string of politically-minded poems. There are other strings as well, but I leave that pleasure of discovery and speculation to the reader. And there are many poems that could have been added to the strings but were separated due to authors having multiple poems, only one of which could be "tied in" without separating their work.

Whatever you pick up on, let me hear about it, and leave comments for the authors. In other words, join in the conversation.

Why You Should NOT Subscribe to Wild Goose Poetry Review

I know it seems odd for an editor to say so, but you should NOT subscribe to Wild Goose Poetry Review. You should, of course, read it . . . repeatedly, but you should not subscribe to it if you are annoyed by your email in-box filling up with notices of postings, specifically with about 30 notices 4 times a year, which is still a lot less than all those poem-a-day blogs, but when you hit one of those 4 days a year when the journal goes live, it probably doesn't seem any less.

I post each poem as a separate blog entry so that readers can leave and read comments on individual poems rather than having to sort through all the comments about an entire issue. But I still like to have a single issue online at a time so that readers can scroll through as if they have

just received their favorite print journal and can read as many poems from it as they want in individual sittings. I also like to have the issues separated as such in the archives.

So, the only solution I know of for those who don't want to receive a deluge of emails on publication days is simply to not subscribe. We have more than 150 subscribers, and although I can see who they are, I don't think I can delete any of them. I believe that can only be done by the subscriber. On the other hand, we have many times more visitors than we do subscribers, and those visitors do not receive emails for every poem we put up.

So, while I enjoy knowing that so many people have elected to subscribe to Wild Goose, if those emails are a nuisance to you, don't subscribe. Read, of course! Come back in the middle of February, May, August, and November to read the new issues, and visit frequently in between to re-read and participate in the comments. Or, send me your email address and I'll put you on a distribution list to receive just one email directly from me announcing each new issue.

I hope this helps, and I hope you enjoy the Winter 2013 issue.

Contents

Tim Peeler, [Webbing](#)
Tim Peeler, [Out the Kitchen Window at Night](#)
Nancy Dew Taylor, [Found](#)
Hilda Downer, [Battle at Blair Mountain](#)
Robert S. King, [A Dutiful Ruler Speaks of Peace](#)
Joseph Mills, [Swimming Lessons](#)
Joseph Mills, [Digging to China](#)
Paul Hostovsky, [Favorites](#)
Kelly Eastlund, [The Poem in the Backseat](#)
Kelly Eastlund, [Blood and Song](#)
Kelly DeMaegd, [Shortest Day Longest Night](#)
Pat Daneman, [His Truck](#)
Sharon Cramer, [Going Forward](#)
Annie Pott, [Desertion](#)
Carson Leonhardt, [Under the Dogwood Tree](#)
Ronald Moran, [Lunch Downtown](#)
Ronald Moran, [Wasps](#)
Ronald Moran, [New Britain, 1952](#)
Heidi Sherlock, [An Undressing](#)
Heidi Sherlock, [Physician Heal Thyself](#)
Anna Weaver, [Not Another Cat Poem](#)
Anna Weaver, [The Poet Buys a Townhouse](#)
Maren O. Mitchell, [Items on the Survival Kit List](#)
Natalie Easton, [Thermography](#)
Annmarie Lockhart, [Carnival](#)
Verna Austen, [Safe](#)
Stephen Davidson, [The Longest Ride](#)

Stephen Davidson, [Response Time](#)
Betty O'Hearn, [Cherries](#)

Reviews

Scott Owens, [Review of Daniel Nathan Terry's "Waxwings"](#)
Helen Losse, [Review of M. Scott Douglass' "Hard to Love"](#)
Scott Owens, [Review of Connie Post's "And When the Sun Drops"](#)
Scott Owens, [Review of Mimi Herman's "Logophilia"](#)
Scott Owens, [Review of Molly Rice's "Mill Hill"](#)
Helen Losse, [Review of Clare L. Martin's "Eating the Heart First"](#)

Tim Peeler
WEBBING

When he runs the single track trails
Around the fields, through the woods
Over fallen trees, busted limbs,
Milky quartz slung here, there,
He moves in short crippled strides
Like a spider accidentally stepped on
By the red-faced farmer, clod hopping
In wee darkness to his dairy.
He knows that relevance is illusive
As the tiresome world grows lonelier
And the first yellow gray beauty
Of the gloaming closer to finality,
And the uphill that always seemed
To be about arms swinging back
To grab power from the cold air
Is really nothing but the stomach
Wall shaping itself into a reason
That still makes sense.

Tim Peeler

OUT THE KITCHEN WINDOW AT NIGHT

He is by himself or rather
His wife is asleep on the couch
And he is awake by himself,
Watching the orange tower lights
Glow on Baker's Mountain, which is
Not really a mountain, they say,
And he would have nothing to say
Even if he were not alone,
Dumping the ice cubes, rinsing his
Scotch glass, filling it with water
And lining the counter with pills,
One more time, the gloomy night so
Dark he only sees a double
Orange eye watching back from its
Own imperious Golgotha.

Bio: Tim Peeler's forthcoming book from McFarland & Co. is The Easter Monday Baseball Game

Nancy Dew Taylor
FOUND
for L.F.

Once a rain-soaked envelope
stamped with a mule's muddy hoof,
once a letter borne by wind
before a storm which she snatched
out of air, ruled lines on back
blank. An old notebook, used
pages torn out, miracle gift
from a traveling teacher.
Lou hoarded these found papers
and late by lamplight in the loft,
she wrote with a tiny stub
miniscule letters from edge
to edge until wick blackened.

She wrote of things she shouldn't:
how deep in woods on Sunday,
the preacher touched Miz Bell's breast,
how she recognized their need
on in-drawn breaths. How the whole
congregation heard that day
the sound of misery's axe
whacking madly at raw oak
at the preacher's new cabin,
his wife's voice berating him:
Don't you know it's the Sabbath?

She wrote of a bug the size
of the word designed in dots
of black on charcoal body,
its round amber eyes one-third
its longish-oval size, wings
standing straight up on its back,
opening like crab's pincers.
Or a white moth stitched under
and over along edges
with amber filament, its
white nearly transparent, all
frothy wings, head hidden by
feet, yet somehow clinging up-
right on a rolled blade of grass.

Every waking minute,
hoeing weeds, sewing, walking,
even as she looked, she wrote,
words swirling, taking mind-shape
to keep until night arrived,
shadowed loft floating in shades,
her haunted hand pausing, then
pacing sure across the page.

Her father called her lazy,
a stubborn dreamer. She knew
he would trade her for a son.
Her mother endured his rules
for chores but stood up for Lou
when with scorn he spoke to her

until the day he found her
found papers, built up the fire.
Stood over her. Piece by piece.

Dry-eyed, she fed everything,
even the nub of pencil.
The fire sent tatters and scraps
into the scattering air,
smacked its word-singed chops, snapped, sang.

Author's Comment: Its form is a seven-syllable line characterized by internal rhyme; the form was that of the Welsh epic *The Mabinogion*. Although I changed the world in which the incident occurred, the story itself was real.

Bio: In 2008 Emrys Press published my chapbook, *Stepping on Air*. My poems have been published in journals such as *Appalachian Journal*, *The South Carolina Review*, and *Tar River Poetry* and in anthologies (among others, *A Millennial Sampler of South Carolina Poetry* and the *Appalachia* volume of *Southern Poetry Anthology*). In 2011 a group of my poems, *Mill Creek Suite*, won the Linda Flowers Award from the North Carolina Humanities Council.

Hilda Downer
BATTLE AT BLAIR MOUNTAIN

A harsh truth in childhood:
who has the most money
to have the most soldiers
wins.

Those plastic green men are formidable,
deadpan faces staring in panic
at not being able to move a finger,
feet captured in puddles of fear.
Redundant postures march awkward
up a steep bank the way
an old commercial showed a truck
could power straight up a mountainside
by tilting the picture so hemlocks,
almost horizontal, speared the sky.

The bomber squad over Blair Mountain
endorsed the same green configuration
of ground troops scaling rock and ridge –
1921: the United States at civil war
with the Appalachian people.
Though one bomb did not explode,
the big guns of poverty and displacement
continue the genocide today
with each subtraction
of another coal-seamed mountain range,
adding up to more fire power
than “Little Boy”
dropped
on Hiroshima.

Still emulating gunfire,
little boys are gathered for sleep,
hard soldiers in a pile
like pieces that do not fit what is broken –
alert to ambush bare feet.
Only a few remain on the battlefield,
the solar warmth they hold
quickly draining.
Never having been alive
does not stop their grim stare
into the shotgun barrel of the full moon.

Bio: Born in Bandana, NC, Hilda Downer is a professor of English at Appalachian State University

Robert S. King
A DUTIFUL RULER SPEAKS OF PEACE

The mirror of the reflecting pool sweats.
Steam rises, curls like a burial gown
into Lincoln's carved lap.

My own sweat is the nation's water supply,
its holy water, a well I've poisoned as well
as those before me, where the wind howls lies
told on so many cold inauguration days,
where truth flees from fists and flags raised
in the blinding fireworks of July.

The blood of my father and children is spoiled,
a green counterfeit I've spilled around the world,
a cultural hemlock I've forced all peoples to drink
even on this Independence Day.

Why not repeat history?
What else can a nation born of war do?
My lady in the harbor carries a torch
to light the battle fire.

The tanks and troops parade by;
the jets whistle above like birds,
rockets like hawks spread contrails
feathery as American dreams.
These are my arms reaching out to the world.

Bio: One Man's Profit is Robert S. King's sixth collection of poetry. He is former Director of FutureCycle Press

Joseph Mills
SWIMMING LESSONS

Because I come from a family of swimmers
and my wife comes from a family of swimmers,
we expected to have a family of swimmers,
and we're surprised when our daughter refuses
to put her head underwater. If even a drop
touches her face, she cries out and gropes
for a towel. Nothing we suggest helps her
overcome this, so we sign her up for lessons.
The instructor, Mrs. White, quickly gets her
away from the curbing, and by the last class
our daughter is swimming entire pool lengths
as I watch and wonder what I could have learned
from my parents if they hadn't been my parents.
Afterwards, she asks, "Did you see me, Daddy?
Did you see me?" and I swing her up, not caring
her suit soaks my clothes. As I pat her face dry
with my tie, the instructor approaches, smiling,
and says, "*She has a very good black... Her black. . .*

I'm so sorry... Her BACKstroke will be good."
She looks distressed, and I understand.
A white parent and a black child can knock
the most well meaning people off balance.
Since Mrs. White is black herself, I want to laugh;
but instead, I say, "Thank you for helping her."
My daughter senses something has surfaced
unexpectedly then submerged just as she feels
something is odd when people look past me
trying to locate her parents, or when they ask,
"Is she yours?" and "Where's her real daddy?"
Someday she'll know more about the currents
around us and she'll understand why we insisted
she know how to swim, how to hold her breath,
and how to deal with the drops that hit you
as you try to navigate the waters of this world.

Author's Comment: Although I often write about my children, I don't often write about race. In part, this is because it's difficult to do well (which is also why I haven't written many romantic poems). It's also because I write to discover what I think, and, mostly, I know what I think about certain issues. Here, however, rather than having something to say – "racism is bad!" – I have an intriguing interaction to explore. I withheld the key aspect "white parent, black child" until halfway because doing so may disorient readers, and their surprise may mimic the surprise of the moment.

Joseph Mills
DIGGING TO CHINA

We didn't get far
since under the sod
and thin sheet of dirt
was rock that broke
our fathers' spades,
splintered the screwdriver handles
we hit with a sledge,
and bent several table knives.

When we asked an older sister
how we could get firecrackers,
M-80s or some kind of explosives,
she walked outside
surveyed the shallow basin
gouged in the yard
and said, *You can't get there
like that.* Her tone said
we were idiots, but I heard,
like that.
Like That.
It was possible.
You could get there.
Somehow.

Author's Comment: Eudora Welty said there is no story until there are two stories. Here, the two are straight-forward, but, for me, endlessly interesting — what we say and what we hear, what we say and what we mean, what we say and what we don't say. As Krazy Kat says, "Language is that we may mis-unda-stend each udda." There also is the discrepancy between our naive ambitions and what can be accomplished.

Bio: Joseph Mills is the Sarah Burrell Wall Distinguished Professor of Humanities at the NC School of the Arts. *Sending Christmas Cards to Huck and Hamlet* is his fourth collection of poetry.

Paul Hostovsky
FAVORITES

“My favorite part of the movie was when he cut off that guy’s head with 2 swords. What was yours?” My 8-year-old son is in PG-13 heaven. His little mug is all lit up like the moon in love with a marquee as we spill out of the Framingham14 Cineplex, late already for his mom’s, who will have my head for this and that. PG-13 for pervasive violence and some sexual content. My favorite is his favorite subject, research topic, science project he’s trying to make grow in a specially reserved corner of my crowded ear. He waters it with questions while I drive: “What’s your favorite color? food? animal? movie? part of the movie?” The sad part is my favorite escapes me like a run-away balloon, a green one, getting smaller and smaller, a tiny speck above a childhood in Plainville, New Jersey. Now it bumps up gently against the window and he bats it at my head. Divorced white male with no favorites seeks favorite. In my 40s, the wrinkles on my forehead have begun to resemble an approximately-equal-to sign. Everything tastes like chicken. Mostly what we’re faced with are these questions concerning the things we don’t love. Because we don’t love things. As though loving people weren’t work enough. I tell him he is my favorite as I pull into his mom’s driveway, her head poking out of the house like a cuckoo in a perfectly accurate clock. But he rolls his eyes at my easy wrong answer, not only because it’s the plain truth, but also because the truth is plain: G for generally happy intact families in your face like balloons, red-white-and-blue ones, blocking your view of beauty which is heads rolling, and chariots crashing, and whole civilizations going up in smoke, not to mention the mothers with their infinitely varying breasts, floating before the green eyes of the incredibly shrinking fathers in disfavor.

Author's Comment: This poem grew out of the "what's your favorite" question, which is the favorite question of children. It's a question that began to stump me when I reached a certain age and looked around to find (yikes) that I didn't have any favorites. They had all disappeared, gone underground, or flown away, or would only talk to me through a lawyer. Suddenly I was in the business of visitation, me and the archangels, and my one remaining favorite wanted a sword.

Bio: Paul Hostovsky is the author of four books of poetry, most recently *Hurt Into Beauty* (2012, FutureCycle Press). His poems have won a Pushcart Prize and been featured on Poetry Daily, Verse Daily, and Best of the Net 2008 and 2009. Garrison Keillor has read Paul's poems on *The Writer's Almanac* seven times. Paul was also recently chosen to be a featured poet in the 2012-2013 Georgia Poetry Circuit. He lives in Boston where he works as a sign language interpreter at the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf.

Kelly Eastlund
THE POEM IN THE BACKSEAT

She's staring out the window.
I keep glancing at the rearview mirror
wondering what she's thinking
I admire her steady eyes, glossy hair,
wait—now it's dull and wild,
homeless-person hair.
She grins (at least I think
that was a grin).
I don't know her, really;
we've only just met, or rather,
she just showed up with a suitcase
and an air of expectation.
I suggest a route. She doesn't stir.
I try another. She nods.
I get excited, then hit a dead end.
She shrugs. We turn,
turn again, double back,
keep rolling,
keep rolling.
We're out beyond the edge of town now.
She seems uncomfortable.
I pull over. We'll wait.
I'm at the wheel, but she's the driver.

Kelly Eastlund
BLOOD AND SONG

One of us will have to go first.
One will open the door for the other
and the morning's duty then,
as now, will be to blend darkness
into ever lighter shades of gold.

Birds, those innocents,
carry twigs to their nests
Feathered breasts
full of blood and song, their
quick heart beats too will end.

Now I hear you in the kitchen making coffee.
A baby cries in the distance.
Our dogs chase a squirrel, crashing
through overgrown rosemary,
leaving a pungent scent in their wake.

Bio:

Kelly Eastlund grew up in Colorado and currently lives in Oregon. Her poems have been published in several online journals, including Four and Twenty, Shot Glass Journal, and Poetry Breakfast.

Kelly DeMaegd
SHORTEST DAY LONGEST NIGHT

Unlike people of ancient times
we are not afraid when winter solstice
descends. We do not fear starvation
or slaughter herds in preparation
for famine months to come.

No, we continue on as always,
train for marathons, drink wine in the evenings,
make love to our spouses. And some of us,
die in our sleep at fifty-one.

Unlike people of ancient times
we are not afraid when the earth tilts
farther from the sun. We do not cover
doorposts with butter, purify women
with ritual baths, perform the spiral dance
to mark the sun's victory over darkness.

No, we plan memorial services,
share food, music, anecdotes.
And some of us find sorrow too hard to bear.
We mourn alone while others do holiday
shopping, and when afternoon slips into evening
we drive to the same barn where we held
our brother's memorial, we take
a handful of pills and end our own life.

Author's Comment: I wrote this poem after learning of a neighbor's sudden death and the subsequent suicide of his brother. These events occurred during the winter months compelling me to explore the cultural symbolism of the winter solstice as well as how the descent into darkness can result in fear and despair.

Bio: Kelly DeMaegd is a newly retired corporate executive currently living in Sherrills Ford, North Carolina with her husband. Her interests now are focused on gardening, mixed media collage and writing poetry. "Longest Night" is her first published poem.

Pat Daneman
HIS TRUCK

She kept the payments up.
On the dashboard kept the Red Sox cap
as if he'd just forgotten it
and would be coming back

the minute the sun lowered
into his eyes. Kept his Navy duffel
on the seat beside her packed
with not much. Mornings

in new places—all those fresh blues
the sky could be, the rain
a different scent depending
on the time of day. She traced

the north coast in a week, salty plumes
of fog slanting off pine bluffs, rimed
yellow flowers. She lingered
in southern towns hemmed in

by tobacco fields—streets paved
with oyster shells, alleys fragrant
with cooking through open screens—
dough and meat taking their turns

in cast iron pans, burners ringing.
Everywhere she heard things
she never had—arguments at gas pumps,
hill birds calling to shore birds,

traffic thrumming on highways miles away.
She learned to sleep in unfamiliar beds,
drive into the sun without a map,
hold the road in storms—

torrents of rain trying to break
the windshield. She learned to change
a flat with a pen light in her teeth,
to ask for anything she wanted.

Author's Comments: I drafted "His Truck" at the Port Townsend Writer's Conference. One morning, I saw a pickup truck parked on the beach. I don't know why I decided the driver was a woman, recently widowed, but that's where my imagination went. I loved how the poem took

her from grief to independence. Recently the poem became more meaningful to me when my husband was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He drives a silver convertible, but when I pull my car into the garage alongside his, sometimes I think of the woman I conjured in my poem and her journey.

Bio: Pat Daneman's recent poems appear or are forthcoming in 10×3 plus, Red River Review, The Bellevue Literary Review, The Naugatuck River Review, and The Comstock Review. She lives in Lenexa, Kansas and is a poetry co-editor for Kansas City Voices magazine.

Sharon Cramer
GOING FORWARD

I think of you
I think of you not
pulling out these thoughts as petals of each day

I think of you as I wake up in the morning
your pillow dented only by my elbow, by my book
with the memory both stale and familiar
I look around the house for traces of you that are not yet used

Over and over
I match pictures of you to my memories
my own Solitaire

Author's Comment: This poem was written June 30, 2009, 6 months after the death of my husband. In late October, 2008, he had a diagnosis of cancer, and six weeks later, he died. As I read the poem now, I can return to the experiences described. I can revisit the fragile healing that was slowly taking place. Now, these years later, the poem helps me realize that the life I lived when I wrote it, muted by grief, is behind me. Reminiscences of my husband are still ever-present, but I have more in my daily life than memories.

Bio: Sharon F. Cramer, Ph.D., SUNY Distinguished Service Professor Emerita at Buffalo State College, was an academic leader and scholar for 26 years before returning to poetry. Recently, she has had poems accepted for publication in Bird's Eye Review, The Journal, Red River Review, Tertulia Magazine, and Wilderness House Literary Review. She is the author of three scholarly books and 25 articles and has given over 100 presentations and keynotes in 23 states and two provinces in Canada.

Annie Pott
DESERTION

Write I say, but my pen is dry.
Write I say again, louder, but the
pencil sits dull in front of me.
Write, I scream, but the keyboard
has turned upside down.

There is no outlet for the thoughts
crowding into corners of my mind.
My eyes see the world and flick away
to another place. I taste the world's
offerings but my tongue says bland.

My ears hear the whispers and horns,
bleats and barks, but in my head
all is silent. There is no love no hate
only a shrug of worldly shoulders.

Everything I have, everything I own,
everything I have ever thought or
ever will think, is stowed away in a
bag tossed carelessly over those worldly
shoulders, bumping along as it moves away.

I can't cry.

Author's Comment: My much-loved mother came to live with us in 2011 and stayed for a year and a half before suddenly passing away. When she died, my pen went dry and my heart just couldn't find the way out of my sorrow. This poem reflects the sadness and lack of life that had been devouring me since her death, before I finally realized that I am still here and have some more life to live and words to share.

Bio: Annie Pott was born in Duluth Minnesota, lived in Southern California and Florida, and now South Carolina. She has been involved with the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute for nearly a decade.

Carson Leonhardt
UNDER THE DOGWOOD TREE

My younger brother saw the striped bass we caught
dead on the wood-dock, asked if they had went to heaven,
like dad—asked where we were to bury them—
the neighbors were burning leaves and laughing,
drinking wine—the unsettled wake rinsing
thick dross hanging to dock pilings, before
leaving the body of a lake, burying into clay
beach, finding a dune of large rocks—
I looked at him, nodded and pointed towards
the dogwood tree in the yard, beside the peeling
white birdhouse that turreted nearly ten feet up.
Alcott took him inside while I cleaned the sponged
bait from the old fishing rods, put
them into the tight closet that hugged
the wall—beside the white rocking chairs. I found
the garden spade in the garage wrapped
in an argyle rag stained with earth; Alcott held his hand
while I bored at stringy grass and dark loam,
three divots adjacent one another,
under the dogwood tree, beside the quiet play-house
and switch-bush. I pulled some small staves
of wood from the brick chips and spiders that spread
out from the feet of shrub-beds. I placed the dead
fish in their rayless pits, after my younger
brother poured lake-water he collected in a plastic
wine glass left sitting on the wrought iron
table—he told us, Alcott and I, that they needed to breathe.

The three of us held hands, kneeling
under the decaying blooms, incense of burnt
leaves and shade of dusk; since dad
had passed my younger brother had always
prayed directly to him:
“Dad, let these fish know we’re sorry, and that the lake
will miss them.”
I heard the rustling of wind
through gaps of leaves, concentrated in the way
sunlight can gather in beams—the neighbors
had stopped laughing, were now staring at us. Alcott
and I waited with our brother under
the tree, as he patted the row
of small hillocks, smoothed the mix of wet
grass and leaf, and soil. The longcase clock

could be heard striking—a quarter past eight,
the one with the heavy chain that mom would pull
to wind until the weights would almost touch
the box casing the clock face—he rose from the umbrella
of the dogwood, with a stretched smile that
widened to a yawn, torn grass hanging
to his pink bare feet.

North Carolina in September, disconnected
leaves falling into brush fire, wind
drawing onto moving lake, sun hanging
onto horizon, bending its own place into the on-look,
the way rabbits in the backyard bury into
the quickset: a tough fretwork of branch. Alcott made
black coffee in the empty kitchen, while
I helped our bother onto the mattress at the foot
of the master bed, stretched the neck on his blue pajamas to fit
carefully over his blonde hair, wound long
sleeves up to their end before working them down to cover
his arms; he looked at me before taking a deep
breath, the kind you aren't sure you will catch
to exhale—he missed dad so much, had less time
with him than us, “It feels good to cry, don't you think?”
he asked. I looked up, at the beige ceiling, light
playing off spinning fan-blades, letting the tears fall
back, away from my cheek—“Yes,” I whispered, “it
shows us that love cannot die; it is a way to organize
our own strength—a measurement
which encourages us to spend the time we have so well
that it's worthy to grieve once it has passed.” The tall
clock downstairs began the first of nine strikes,
the smell of coffee climbed the side stairwell which
summited into the narrow hallway outside the bedroom
door. I watched his eyes fall shut, and thought about how my younger
brother was wiser than I, how he saw
salvation in our sport, our dinner, and wanted something
more than a meal, more than a hook on a rod, a funeral
thereafter, a family to pray with.

Alcott and I sat outside on the verandah,
drinking coffee from the mugs
our father once had; we looked into the yard, and
beyond it to the faint red and green lights of party-yachts and life
moving on. I studied the makeshift graves under
the tree, imagined the dead fish floating under packed
soil, realized how much more that meant than a fishing trip, or a

report card. I watched the thunderclouds encroach
on the haloed-moon and cold air, bunching close to keep
warm, I noticed the way our breathing was visible
and how it formed the same plume as burning leaves
in night air—we watched the rain first dent
into the sanded lake, and wind lay
down the tombstone-branches. And I smiled
because it did not matter that the markers fell,
only that they had once marked,
that my younger brother had marked them.

Ronald Moran
LUNCH DOWNTOWN

I am in this restaurant with my daughter and granddaughter
for lunch,
and this server begins by telling us how he broke his glasses
this morning
and can see clearly only in the distance, a kid probably home
from college.

Now no one else can get another word in, ever since Sally,
my daughter,
had to ask him, *How did you break them?* Which, of course,
led
to a discourse involving something like flexible rims that one
can twist

like sticks of licorice; and, meanwhile, as I am trying to read
the menu
the letters seem to be leaning this way or that, and swooping
over
the menu like lost swallows on a flight back home. And then,
well,

I realize that I am confusing my vision with his, that somehow
in this
corner of the universe, I have actually empathized with someone
I do not
know, nor ever will, but our tracks have crossed some invisible
boundary,

like those that keep dogs in yards or old people in the home,
if only
momentarily, and so I listen more carefully, take my eyes off
the menu,
and nod sympathetically, as he now begins to recount his past,
passionately.

Ronald Moran
WASPS

I suppose, sometimes I did not control my
actions
or demeanor or whatever separates mature
adults
from students while I taught English full-time
at
Clemson University, during a five-year period
when
I held no administrative post to supplement
my

salary and, hence, I must have thought I could
act
like a goon with impunity in the safety of my
office,
to free whatever demons were trying to run
my life—
as common as it was then—which means
little
to inner or outer demons, who relish our flaws.
One spring

a swarm of wasps invaded the corner, eighth-floor
windows
of Strode Tower, my home, and since the P Plant
wanted
nothing to do with wasps, it was up to my buddy
Harold,
whose office was next to mine, and me to find
a way
to save us from the imminent threat of wasps
occupying

our offices, thus cutting short our tenure, two
almost
middle-age faculty with the world of literature
before us,
so I took the lead, with Harold's concurrence,
found
a wasp, dead on the floor, and taped it to one
of the tall
leaky windows in my office, as if it were a cross,
my version

of an omen I wanted the workers to convey
to
their Queen and, well, they were gone within
24 hours,
with no fanfare whatsoever, and Harold and I
resumed
preparing for classes, grading papers, meeting
with students,
none of whom ever knew the perilous threat
we averted.

Ronald Moran
NEW BRITAIN, 1952

I am reading a novel set in England toward
the end
of the 19th century, where a woman of station
says
to a much younger woman of no station
Forgive me
for saying so, but no woman of my class would
wish

a man of her family to marry quite so far below
him;
and I think of a time 50 years ago when I once
took out
a girl below my middle, middle-class family
who
was lovely and as nice as she was lovely, too.
My

mother thought she was unacceptable, and
at 16
I knew why, but that meant very little to me,
since
I liked her—Polish background and long name,
including
her living in a three family walk-up off Broad—
but I knew

my mother, a Hungarian in disguise as a WASP
with
her married name, would soon stare at me as
she did
too often at my father, with that *No, No* look,
saying
nothing, but we knew exactly what she meant
then,

in New Britain, Connecticut, early 1950s, so
I never
asked this lovely girl out again, but, O, what
I missed;
how I wish I could say to her now, *I am sorry*
Sweet girl,

with the bright eyes, white blouse, whose life
I lost.

Bio: RONALD MORAN retired from Clemson University where he served as professor/dean. He was educated at Colby College and Louisiana State University. Moran's poems have been published in Commonweal, Connecticut Poetry Review, Emrys Journal, Louisiana Review, North American Review, Northwest Review, The Orange Room Review, South Carolina Review, Southern Poetry Review, Southern Review, Tar River Poetry, and in eleven books/chapbooks of poetry. His poetry has received a number of awards.

Heidi Sherlock
AN UNDRRESSING

Flocks of leaves are a clever ruse.
In a blur of wings
birds betray former seasons
where dappled greens and shadows hang
and hide the arms beneath.
Fitted behind drape of shade and olive hues
a tree is hidden in a loud display,
that burlesque winds of autumn
will slowly strip away.
Leaving gray tones of winter
and months of vulnerable disclosure
when black threaded fingers
of twigs bleed out from branches
in an august ashen flow—
a willful clenching of the sky.

Author's Comments: The poem was inspired by the beauty of trees in winter and the appearance of a flock of birds cast against the cold, twilight sky. Stripped bare the tree is at once vulnerable and beautiful; it seems that the former always precedes the latter. For trees and men there is often a discomfort in such nakedness. The birds, however, are oblivious. What we could learn from the birds!

Heidi Sherlock
PHYSICIAN HEAL THYSELF

Let me take the p and shove its dowager's hump of a back through the hole.
Then follows the o.
I'll pop it through the opening like a grape.
It will make a sound like the suck of air after the opening of a jar.
Next is the e.
I'll shove it in and up hoping that the little tail at the end of the turtle shell does not get caught.
At last I will back up to the m and push its washboard shoulders through the hole.
Strung with letters my needle does its work.
Thimble tips stroke the page, protecting the lily white paper.
Piercing and piecing remnants of soul tatters,
my nimble fingers thread a poem, suture a wound.

Author's Comments: This poem had its genesis in the last line. I also liked the idea of making a poem a literal, animate object. Imagery played a big part here. As poets we cobble together our observations, experiences and impressions and give them new form, as in a new garment. Hopefully the result is something that ministers to the soul. Often, we are agents of our own healing.

Anna Weaver
NOT ANOTHER CAT POEM

This is not another cat poem
and it's not about death, although it's true
the cat died last Friday. It's also not
about divorce, which might be a surprise.

No, this poem will be about something new,
so new I have not yet seen it. Oregon,
maybe. Or the Northern Lights.
Or Mt. Lemmon in Tucson. I'll find someone
who's seen those things and tease this poem
out of him. He'll insist I try the blueberry pie
at the Mt. Lemmon Cafe, where the waitress
will say, with practiced bemusement,
"Do you want that a la mode or all alone?"
And I will work her into every story I tell
about Tucson—right after I tell about the saguaro,
the way they look so huggable until you get up close.

He will go on to marry someone else, that man,
and I will tell my Tucson story at his wedding
and hug his new wife like a saguaro.

That's how I know this isn't a divorce
poem. And they will be dog people,
which rules out the cat. And I will write
this poem quickly, before any of us
has a chance to die.

Author's Comment: When my 17-year-old cat died, I was amazed at how many memories he was part of—two serious boyfriends, three cross-country moves, a marriage, a divorce, other events large and small. Looking forward, I knew that everything I did from then on, I would do without him. Perhaps most important, I also knew that the world did not need—well, not from me at least—another cat poem. So I didn't write one.

Anna Weaver

THE POET BUYS A TOWNHOUSE

not a poet's villa with a poet's garden
planted with moonlight and nightingales

not a cliffside cottage just a short, misty walk
from ocean-crashed rocks that groan with lonely endurance

not an urban-gritty hotel room with rotary phone,
daily rates, and a view of hookers or *les barricades*

a townhouse, freshly painted
in the beige-est of eggshell ecru
tabula rasa with modern appliances
(out of warranty but serviceable)

and a loony neighbor
on the other side of the party wall

holiday flag flapping hard as her upper arm
waving hello in a technicolor housecoat

and yes, above the townhouse, the moon
moving from one skylight rectangle
to the next, three hops over the living room
and on to gardens and oceans and barricades

"oh," says the neighbor,
"I've never understood poetry," meaning

I don't expect to understand you
and so I consign you to the realm of mystery and moonlight.

Author's Comment: I imagine every poet considers, if only briefly, whether he or she fits the stereotype of Poet. And I'm all but certain anyone who ever said to a new acquaintance, "I'm a poet," has found it to be something of a conversation stopper. What tickles me is how that reaction is tinged with confession, as though I have the power to absolve them for some sin committed against their 7th grade English teacher. I mean, we don't seek forgiveness from scientists we meet for not understanding chemistry or biology...

Bio: Raised in Oklahoma, Anna Weaver lives in North Carolina with her two daughters. She reads frequently at Raleigh-area open mics, and her poems have appeared in Star*Line, Referential Magazine, Utter Magazine, and elsewhere

Maren O. Mitchell
ITEMS ON THE SURVIVAL KIT LIST

At our table in the mountain town coffee shop,
while college students give a poetry reading,
the young New Yorker,
a blue-eyed Cheshire cat,
smiles as his mother introduces him
to us: he edits film
for a living. His smile stretches on
as he disclaims and labels writing:
Words are over-rated.

My iamb-loving friend Joan
chuckles: *Like Dr. Seuss,*
we are all waiting to be discovered.
She packs her heart and eyes
into meter and rhyme
woven dense as Kevlar,
no words unnecessary.

My main dream sits beside me,
urges me to write
toward another goal—
fill books with poems.
On the brink of old age,
my third aim fights for space:
drop ambition
grasp the calm
heft and sheen
of brevity.

Author's Comment: Balancing the need and use of words is constant in speech and writing. I am trying to be more selective in both the need and the use.

Bio: Maren O. Mitchell's poems have appeared in Southern Humanities Review, The Journal of Kentucky Studies, Pirene's Fountain, Appalachian Journal, The Arts Journal, and elsewhere. Her book, *Beat Chronic Pain, An Insider's Guide*, has been released through Line of Sight Press, <http://www.lineofsightpress.com/>, and is available on Amazon. For twenty years, across five states, she has taught the Japanese art of origami.

Natalie Easton
THERMOGRAPHY

Without any hesitation but the truth
I bare my breasts for a woman
I met five minutes ago.
I bare them for an intimate act
which has more to do with who
I am on the inside than losing
my virginity to my first real boyfriend
at sixteen and a half under pressure,
a ritual I made him wait
almost two years for before
I presented myself without warning,
a condom in one hand and a course
of synthetic hormones running through my blood.

She is about to see them,
a map of estrogen and consequence,
a latticework of womanhood below
my exterior more complex than lingerie.
I turn this way and that
so she can capture me at every angle,
the story of my mother's death
still hanging in the air somewhere
between my skin and the camera,
an after-image the physician will keep
stoked as he interprets my heat signatures.

There is no protection this time,
no shield between me and possibility,
me and another life
potentially bursting within me,
growing larger like my fear did then
once my shirt was on
and I wondered what I had just done.

When the results come, they will not
be suspicious, but not optimal,
like the motives of most who have touched me.
The suspect terminology I'll discuss
with her anxiously will refer, as it turns out,
to a vein in my right breast
which lies especially close to the surface.
I'll trace it later with my finger,
never having noticed it before,

and remember what she'll smile apprehensively and say
as though introducing an embarrassing acquaintance;
"This is your body."

Author's Comment: After my mother passed away in 2012 from breast cancer, I signed up for my first thermogram. I was told I had an excess of estrogen and decided I wanted to get off hormonal birth control. What ensued was a surprisingly emotional and difficult choice over other birth control options, and that is when it finally struck me how little control women really have over their own bodies. This poem was born soon thereafter from my feelings of violation, fear, and anger.

Annmarie Lockhart
CARNIVAL

from the top of the ferris wheel,
the lower limit of the pinprick stars,
you can see the girl wander off,
turn her back on the
clown comfort conformity
give up the sticky suburb
cotton candy for sickly
neon, pole music
scrap salvage needle pop
life of another circus, one
that doesn't leave town,
sequin parade of dollar bill
g-strings where make-up
covers bruises and midnight
hardens the soft flesh of every
bruised imported peach

Bio: Annmarie Lockhart is the founding editor of vox poetica, an online literary salon dedicated to bringing poetry into the everyday. She lives in northern New Jersey, two miles from the hospital where she was born.

Verna Austen
SAFE

My water color paints
and colored pencils
tucked safe in my grey sweater
with the book about Mr. Vincent
under the bed where I sleep
at Granny's house
jars of still warm put-up line the pantry shelves
like rows of teeth

I draw Granny's face
the deep lines like a treasure map
her bobby-pinned curls wound tight on her head
her eyes say: I am a mountain, try and move me

Mama bends her shoulders down
like she already lost
puffs again on her cigarette
the burnt end lit up orange like a firefly

what happened
what happened
Granny and Mama
at the kitchen table
with a box of beer
and a full up ashtray between them

Mama lost her job and
couldn't figure the computers at the library to look for another one and
it was too hard and
what can she do anyway and
might as well close my eyes
but for the girl

I lie in the hallway
pretending not to listen
and paint the old barn
with its wood peeling away
like old dreams

Author's Comments: Many of my stories and poems start off with 'what if.' What if someone loses their home and has no job and no support system. Luckily the family in Safe have each other. But many people have no one. What happens then?

Bio: Verna Austen's poems and short stories have appeared in *The Dead Mule*, *Flying Island*, *The Minnetonka Review* and others. In 2005 she obtained her MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University.

Stephen Davidson
THE LONGEST RIDE

Stephen, come here!
Dad tells mom we'll be right back.
We get in the car and head off.

The interrogation starts.
Who came over today?
Pat came over.

What did they talk about?
Did you go anywhere?
The questioning intensifies.

No, just stayed home.
I don't believe you!
Were they talking about me?

No. Why are we going into the mountains?
His voice rises from his red face, snarled lips.
Tell me, what were they talking about!

Scared, shaking, crying,
coughing from my mucous
I couldn't talk anymore.

If you don't tell me,
I will leave you here!
Suddenly the car stops.

Looking out the window,
Pitch black on a dirt road.
Wishing I was in mom's arms.

More screaming, then suddenly laughter,
Alright, I believe you,
Do not tell your mother, understand!

Stephen Davidson
RESPONSE TIME

I have traveled thousands of miles
Looking for a peaceful place,
Where my family could live.
We finally found it, surrounded
By trees, water, blue skies
And the animals that live among us.

Was the path we took
Pure luck or faith?
I tend to lean on both.
Had we not taken that road
Congestion, response time,
Would have done me in.

I have gone to the other world
Twice, and been brought back.
I heard my name being called,
Peaceful, relaxed, happy,
I replied, I'm ok,
Just dreaming.

I was in one world then
Back to this one,
The road led me to
Two peaceful worlds.

Bio: Originally from L.A., Stephen Davidson now lives in Bethlehem, NC. Formerly aquarium-builder for the stars, these are his first published poems.

Betty O'Hearn
CHERRIES

Red beauty, sweet anticipation
draw me in. Stem yielding from center,
flesh rolled between fingers.

I bite carefully, wait
to feel you explode.

Expensive, I know,
but you are better than chocolate,
and I am worth it.

Bio: Betty O'Hearn lives in Hickory, NC. Her previous work was in "Dead Mule".

Review
by Scott Owens

WAXWINGS

Daniel Nathan Terry

Lethe Press

ISBN: 9781590213551

Daniel Nathan Terry's book of poems, *Waxwings*, is a powerful exploration of the internal and external forces surrounding the phenomenon of personality development.

From the very first poem, "Scarecrow," the reader is invited into an internal drama that begins with the recognition of identity as an artifact, a creation, a projection of the individual's concept of self, tested, influenced, re-tested, and ultimately determined against the backdrop of familial and social expectations and pressures. Successfully employing an ambiguity that seems almost whimsical at the same time it is somehow disturbing, this modern-day Pygmalion refers to himself as "Scarecrow crafter, burlap-tailor, / black-eye smudger" and claims such prowess in his crafting that "crows mistake you for a man." As in the original Greek myth of Pygmalion, the creator has a rather intimate relationship with the creation as he "fisted through your flannel" and "perfumed your thighs with summer sweet." Not surprisingly given that level of intimacy, the distinctions between creator and created become blurred as the speaker worries about "flies . . . who do not care / if you are flesh or straw" and "the sun, the wind, the rain" which will "make fast work of you until your pie-pan hands / cease to flutter" and ultimately wonders "How long before the snow and I / take you down?"

The theme of personality development and the individual as identity-artist, treated metaphorically in this first poem's conceit, is addressed more plainly in subsequent poems. In "Self-Portrait (Gay Son of a Preacher)," for example, the speaker desperately seeks redemption for, perhaps even salvation from, identity elements he has been taught to be ashamed of through such traditional religious concepts as baptism ("washed seven times in the river Jordan") and communion ("He rises, joins the altar call"). In fact many of the poems in the first third of the book chronicle the speaker's increasingly desperate attempts to reconcile his identity with the demands and expectations of a world that denounces and even disallows that identity, forming a collective narrative of a difficult childhood marked by taught shame and a reluctance to accept oneself because that self is deemed unacceptable to others. Thus in "Wicker Man" the speaker reflects, "if you believe the talk, you know your kind was consigned to the fire by God in the cities of the plain." And in "Called colored, in my youth," he explains, "I already knew I shouldn't want to play with those boys, shouldn't // want boys of any color the way I wanted the oldest of them."

As the book progresses, the speaker experiences exile and loneliness, as in the beautifully simple-stated "Since they put you out":

no chair receives you,
no bath invites you,
no stove pot simmers

you to supper, no mattress
gives to cradle you,
no down rises to fill
the empty spaces.

Eventually, with much work in the realm of human emotion including the losses that teach us better how to love, the speaker is able to move beyond the taught shame, the loneliness, and the uncertainty of a disallowed identity towards self-awareness, acceptance, and love of self and others. In a book of wonderful poems, the most wonderful embodies this entire process. “Snow falls in Hartsville,” is a brilliant linked sonnet sequence about love, self-knowledge and acceptance, illustrating how we come to be and accept who we are, narrated so evocatively that readers can’t help but feel, despite the uncommon details, that the speaker is relating their own story. Indicating the speaker’s arrival at the fulfillment of the self-discovery process, the poem concludes:

Now, I’d like to believe
I’m the man I was always meant to be—leaning in
to my lover, to my life, to the wonder
of having once been a man who loved a woman
who was almost the perfect man for me.

This vital story of self-realization that constitutes *Waxwings* is expressed through luminous, original, and breathtaking imagery and symbolism that make the book, regardless of subject-matter, just good poetry. Thus, in “Waxwings,” we hear of “thirty-seven waxwings / necklacing the telephone wire” who suggest to the speaker the possibilities of human collaboration and love as he imagines his disparate classmates “joined together in a star of arms and legs / that kaleidoscopes in the blackness” and longs to respond to the poetic urge developing inside him, to “read their characters on the white sky // until he understands, until they become a story / he can share.” And in “The Swan,” we see “one lone swan // chalked on the surface of the black water.” And in “Burning the Peach,” as the speaker prepares for the loss of a loved one, we know how it feels when he tells us, “Black smoke made invisible by the night invaded our throats, settled inside us like an unwelcome truth.”

Sometimes these days it seems popular culture suggests that drama is only conceivable against a sensationalistic backdrop of vampires or a zombie apocalypse or a teacher-turned-meth-cook. It’s refreshing to see real, familiar human drama, the drama of one’s struggle to enact selfhood, treated with the honesty, dignity, respect, relevance, and insight our lives, our human processes, truly deserve. Simply put, for both the process it dramatizes and the poetic brilliance it exhibits, *Waxwings* is the best book of poems I read in 2012, one that should be read by all, and one I will return to to read again and again.

Review
by Helen Losse

Hard to Love
M. Scott Douglass
Main Street Rag Publishing Company
ISBN: 9781599483429

M. Scott Douglass's *Hard to Love* starts off with a virtual bang, a wedding with the bride "seven month pregnant, belly as big as a beach ball." Her mother "didn't give a lick...as long as no bastard popped out" before the wedding. The daughter knew her baby's father sold her father "stolen windows," and living next door to her parents, looked at them for years. As the babies came, and her "embarrassment" faded, "soot-faced Ryans / wrestled on the lawn." ("Windows," pp. 3-4). Life—often less than lovely—creates people and situations that are "hard to love." Or does it? How hard is it to love reality?

Set in the "fertile soil" of Pennsylvania, where Douglass grew up, and in North Carolina, where he lives as an adult, the early poems deal with "[the] rebellious seed [that] took root" in him and the "loneliness" that accompanied "personal upheaval."

...I beat up every neighborhood kid my age
the summer before we left Monroeville...

said the boy with "way too much wiggle room." ("The Summer of '65," pp. 9-11) A precursor to change, the turmoil is both internal and external.

Then there were the riots in Los Angeles

[that] burned into me
at nine years old, are with me still,
...signs
...convulsions of change, the fiery
residuals of starting over."
("The Summer of '65," p. 11)

The next year his family moved.

Douglass writes of moving on—of the change: it's difficulty and it's challenge, and yet, he "thank[s] the road, my muse" (p.93). Change sparks creativity in Douglass. *Hard to Love* deals with the reality of constant change. Filled with snippets of history and old television shows, characters and local events from his past, the poems in the book's first two sections document Douglass's struggle with the universal task of growing to adulthood.

For example, the classic joke about the "unpackaged prophylactic" becomes a lesson in solidarity with one's peers.

They swore upon the fifty pound
unabridged Holy Bible...
that they were victims of this prank.
...stuck together,...
at any hint of doubt.
(“The Boys of Round Ball,” p. 19)

Douglass also writes of death and violence. “Even though my life’s not Hollywood, / it sure as hell isn’t dull,” he writes, after an encounter with a war-loving grandpa. (“Oklahoma Jack,” p. 26) And yet, watching a sunrise reminds him that each day is a “tease—like an endless / lap dance: so much promise / so much illusion.” Here the “gaudy” becomes almost tender before the letdown. (“Morning,” p. 29)

With wit and honesty, he exposes his reader to a kaleidoscope of input.

...J-Lo’s face is pasted
on every magazine cover...
when it’s her jiggly butt
that really piques our interest...
(“Daredevil Duck,” pp. 33-34)

And

...isn’t it good
to know your platinum passport.
is right there with you,...
you’ll never forget, especially
when the bill arrives each month
to tell you, you are priceless.
(“What’s In Your Wallet,” p. 39)

Seeing a billboard while travelling,

my mind cuts to commercial and I see
this squirrely guy with curly hair
in the middle seat of the rear bench
of a mid-sized Chevy truck...

[then on to] a Cialis commercial. You know
macho guys, trucks—
not hitting on all cylinders....

[Taking the joke further]

...Country Bob in the men’s room
...bursting from the john like Superman

from a phone booth, buck naked,
a beer bottle in one hand, his pride
in the other....
("A view From the West Virginia Turnpike," pp. 40-41)

Douglass keeps this barrage up—page after page.

A keen observer, a fine story teller, and the possessor of an rude and partisan wit, he can be crass and opinionated, but he never holds back. Douglass tells it like it is. The "hard to love." can also be funny.

He sometimes pits ugliness against beauty. For example, in a poem about wiring Ann Coulter's mouth shut, he compares right-wing politics to "a cavernous Rush Limbaugh yawn / or the bat caves of Austin emptying / at sunset, blackness / spill[ing] forth again." He entitles the poem, "Silence Is Golden" (p. 42) Quite a contrast: gold versus black.

A Yankee poet, editor, and North Carolina book publisher, M. Scott Douglass has published more North Carolina poets on his Main Street Rag Publishing Company than any other publisher. He mingles and fits well in his new home state. In "Crawl Night," "Eau De Adams," and several other poems in book's fourth section, he describes the women—the "chicks"—who visit local art galleries and other Charlotte locations, wearing "the grunge look / or the preppy neatness of business-class...." ("Crawl Night," p. 58) Douglass has

been in the South so long
[he] sometimes forgets the nights
[he]...
watch[ed] lake-effect snow drift....
[and] remember[s] those younger,
colder days, a tear frozen
at the corner of [his] eye....
("Yankee Morning," p.73)

The final section of *Hard to Love* includes Douglass's friend "TK," who appears in more than one poem, poems about road trips, and poems about cars and motorcycles. Douglass does love his motorcycle. Waiting at a traffic light on his Harley, he yearns to be anything other than "invisible." And he is. A bit of a daredevil in a car as well as on a bike, he's a daredevil with an eye for beauty. If life is about always moving on, Scott Douglass's muse serves him well.

...Go so you don't get left behind.
Go while there's still a reason.
Go while you still can.
("Mustang Days," p. 87)

Hard to Love by M. Scott Douglass is a book of keenly observed, deeply-felt poems in which the poet guides the reader toward a love of that which is "hard to love." The book deals with

memory without getting stuck in the past. In it, memory is what makes us what we are, and travel is what puts us in a place to make those memories.

Review
by Scott Owens

AND WHEN THE SUN DROPS

Connie Post
Finishing Line Press
ISBN: 9781622290581

No one gets it right all the time. And even when we get it right, we never get it entirely right. Even the best human life consists of minor flaws and blemishes. Connie Post's poetry in her new book *And When the Sun Drops* demonstrates her understanding of this as she reflects on the successes and failures of her life with an autistic son. Ironically, these poems also demonstrate that when it comes to poetry at least, Post is one of the best because she comes closer to getting it right much more often than most.

A good poem carves out space in the tedium and distraction that normally fill our minds for meaningful imagination, for the practice of closer perception, reflection, and human empathy. A good poem makes us, if not better people, then at least better perceivers, thinkers, relaters, better users of some of the skills that make us people. In her poem "Bridge Collapses Into the Mississippi," Post uses visceral imagery such as "I imagine . . . / what the hard edge / of water / must feel like" and "the open sigh / of the river" to make an almost literal impression on the surface of our minds, to help us perceive and empathize.

Post knows, however, that the deepest impression is made not by the imagery she captures and conveys but by the imagery she coaxes us into creating for ourselves. Thus, later, as she reflects on the actual event from 2007 mentioned in the title and on the memories that must have followed, she leaves room for the reader's imagination to fill in the blanks in perception and thereby strengthen our empathetic capacity,

the screeching will
make unannounced visits
on nights
when the river appears
to be sleeping.

Such opening of space for the reader's imagination and empathy is how a poet creates resonance, those lines that are haunting, that literally give us chills.

At this point in the book, the reader might rightfully wonder how this poem about a tragic bridge accident has anything to do with raising an autistic child. Again, Post brilliantly leaves room for the reader to fill in the blanks, in this case to draw the lines that connect the imagery of a bridge collapse with the feelings of parenting a child whose communication and perception differ so significantly from what most of us can understand. Most readers will be unable to make this connection before reading a significant portion of the book, but Post provides the language of that connection here to resonate throughout the poems that follow:

I still find myself going back
to the elegiac banks of the same river

watching the water silently forgive itself
for not knowing
how to cease.

Through the narrative of this opening poem and its connection to the poems that follow, that river becomes metaphor for the Sisyphean human endeavors that define parenting and loving, namely to communicate, to sustain, to help, and to accept.

Essentially, the story behind these poems is not only the story of that river but the story of all of us who begin on insufficient knowledge, who go on, “not knowing / how to cease.” These poems show us that it is not possible to wait until things make sense. We know that hindsight will show us our flaws, but the choices have to be made when they present themselves, even if we do not recognize the very nature of the choice, as expressed in “Speaker with Autism Presents at Local Community College at 7 p.m.”:

now that you are in your twenties
your disability changes shape
today — it makes more sense
why you screamed so much when you were young
hit yourself throughout adolescence.

And so we see the speaker of these poems in “Getting You Dressed” persisting in the only way any of us really can:

fastening one snap
at a time

straightening
your collar
one fold at a time

dressing you
one year at a time

even while she knows that they “leave the room . . . / holding the same abacus / the same beads falling.”

Finally, Post reminds us that just as no one gets it right all the time, neither does any society; and that just as Sisyphean persistence in efforts to communicate, sustain, and help is essential to individual progress, so is it also to social progress. Her poem, “A Letter in the Newspaper,” which I repeat almost entire here, makes this clear:

“This group home has no right to exist in our neighborhood”

how do I tell you
that there is bigotry in the world
hidden in neighborhoods
with white doors
and narrow streets

how do I tell you
when you can't talk
why they will not speak to you

how do we find a way
to let the asphalt hold more than the weight
of ourselves

.....

I am not usually thankful
that you can't understand
so many things

but today,
when I open the morning paper
and see the scorn divided out
like servings of broken dessert

I am secretly grateful
that you cannot know this sting
feel words like thistles
from those who will never give you
your last cup of water before bed

Review
by Scott Owens

LOGOPHILIA
Mimi Herman
Main Street Rag
ISBN: 9781599483887

Not surprisingly, given its title, Mimi Herman's debut collection of poems, *Logophilia*, is a book for all those who love words, who hold such reverence for and have such familiarity with words that they like nothing better than to take them out at every opportunity and do what every logophiliac most loves to do: play with them, shamelessly, publicly, joyfully.

Thus, one of the greatest joys the reader discovers in *Logophilia* is a sense of playfulness, a sense of fun, a sense of humor. Only in a book characterized by such a strong sense of humor could the reader expect to find such offbeat and surprising similes as "the last piece of chocolate cake, as alluring / as a showgirl leaning against the backstage door / asking if you can give her a lift" (from "The Visualizing Mind Has No Word for No"). Or a love poem in which the speaker proclaims to her lover, "You fill me up like a Pop-Tart fills the toaster," or "You're a high like exercise (if exercise behaved as advertised), / like hitting butter halfway down the popcorn bucket" (from "Fill Her Up").

If these unusual similes don't make it clear that this book is the playground of a word-lover, then the title poem, spells it out:

I love the way words mate in my mouth,
butter and fingers, even and song,
or play in the park,
the way jump and rope join
and go skipping down the street.

Another of the qualities greatly to be admired in *Logophilia* is its seamless organicism. I admit to liking best those books of poems that seem of a single piece, whether that piece is narrative, thematic, or stylistic. When I encounter such a book, I find I often want to speak of it in one ridiculously long sentence, as if all the poems were really one, making statements and providing examples that build ultimately a single impression, moment, or idea. I have, of course, in the interest of simplicity and perhaps a sense of humility consistently resisted the urge to create such a one-sentence review. But, now, Herman's own audacity with language makes me think it might just this once be appropriate. So, here goes.

Ultimately, what the reader discovers in reading *Logophilia* is that if Herman is a valid example, then any lover of words is also likely to be a lover of all that matters: life, love, beauty and unbeauty (as in "Role Models" — "How can I not love the zaftig and stout, / the what it's all about ladies / who are twice my size and attitude / and move as if to say / Who can resist / my kick and luscious sway?"); flaws and challenges (as in "God Is Not a Short-Order Cook" — "You can't ask for one marriage, over easy, / . . . / can't wave the waitress to your booth / and

demand the healthy kid special, extra syrup. // . . . God won't whip up / an end to war while you wait"); fairy tales (as in "The Fairy Tale Emotion Series"), mythology (as in "Miriam" and "Cassandra"), history (as in "Eleanor"), and cartoons (as in "Warner Brothers Physics"); storms (as in "The Storm"); sublimity and mystery (as in "Do Not Disturb" — "Do Not Disturb // the willow oak leaves tangled in a web / outside your living room window // . . . / a dam a six-year-old has made of sticks / . . . / a dying insect, / a man, crying"); and most importantly, knowledge and the unknown, as in "On the Importance of Explanatory Text" —

Even in museums, I experience vertigo
if I stare straight at a painting
without first grounding myself in the title

.....

I have requested that you take a few minutes from your day
to compose a series of labels I can use
to keep from being overwhelmed with dizziness
at the sight of you in repose
or standing by the stove stirring eggs

.....

or suddenly in a crowd
where I hadn't expected you to be.

I need a label . . .
to be prepared
should I survive you

.....

to place above your headstone.
Something simple and complete
that will help me understand,
that will keep the vertigo at bay
so I won't fall off the earth
you're buried in.

That about says it. Read Logophilia for something different, for a love of words, language, logic, meaning, life, and above all, fun.

Review
by Scott Owens

MILL HILL
Molly Rice
Finishing Line Press
ISBN: 159924960x

In “Nikki Rosa,” one of her best-known poems, African-American poet Nikki Giovanni writes:

I really hope no white person ever has cause
to write about me
because . . . they’ll
probably talk about my hard childhood
and never understand that
all the while I was quite happy.

One white poet who probably would understand is Molly Rice, whose debut collection, *Mill Hill*, expresses the same bittersweet perspective on what was indeed a difficult childhood.

The location of Rice’s poems is key and is made clear in the collection’s title. *Mill Hill* is a colloquial Southern expression for the textile mill villages that seemed ubiquitous in North and South Carolina for the first seventy years of the 20th century. For some, particularly those moving from rural upbringings, for awhile, these villages could seem urbane, almost sophisticated with their paved streets, indoor plumbing, and door-to-door delivery of everything from newspapers to milk and eggs.

Over time, however, most mill village residents came to recognize a new form of poverty inherent in this lifestyle, a poverty created by separation from the natural world and the natural cycles of agrarian life, by the lack of autonomy intrinsic with being “a company man” in “a company town,” by the physically debilitating demands of industrial labor, and by a socio-economic framework of expectations and limited income seemingly designed to deny self-sufficiency and foster co-dependence and self-medication.

In *Mill Hill* Rice has written poems that beautifully and perfectly capture the experience of growing up amid the poverty, abuse, frustration, and anger of a mid-century Southern textile town. Like Giovanni, however, Rice recalls that while children are capable of comprehending the dangers and frustrations of their lives, their recalcitrant innocence also makes them experts at making the best of such circumstances, resulting in memories of times that while perhaps not “happy” always seem “happy enough.”

The book’s best poem, “Home Front,” expresses this duality most clearly. Telling the charming story of children whose faces are painted with the dust of lightning bugs so as to be fluorescent as they play outside at night, Rice reminds us first of the physical demands placed upon this family through the image of the mother’s “rough, yarn-worn fingers” and then of the psychological challenges they face in the haunting lines,

tonight, with him not home,
we three little Indians
escape a scalping
and dance in the dusk —
glowing.

The contrast of innocence against the crueler realities and intentions of the Mill Hill is repeated in poems like “Tired Child” and “Swing.” Sometimes the possibility of joy seems to have the upper hand or at least remain feasible, as in “Sightings,” where the speaker tells us, “We woke up / covering our eyes / from the brightness/ of a hallelujah sky.” In other poems, however, like “The Other Way,” where the poem’s addressee “took pain pills and never woke up,” the tragic loss of hope prevails.

Sometimes the complicity of other social institutions in this new breed of poverty is made clear. In “Free Will,” for example, the existence of classism and the callousness towards poverty even in a place as supposedly egalitarian as a church is portrayed in the words of a parishioner who declares about the speaker and her sister, “Those girls only come for the food!”

Like all good poems, those in Molly Rice’s Mill Hill are full of sorrow and joy, pain and happiness, as they make clear that Rice does indeed understand the duality Nikki Giovanni recalls from her childhood. What makes these poems unique is that they find these qualities in and express them from a specific time, a specific place. In her closing poem, “Pharr Yarns,” Molly Rice asks “Who is left? / Who will do the millwork?” If millwork can be understood in this case to mean memory, then Mill Hill is Rice’s clear and resounding answer.

Review
by Helen Losse

EATING THE HEART FIRST

Clare L. Martin
Press 53, 2012
ISBN:9781935708667

In her debut poetry collection *Eating the Heart First*, Clare L. Martin describes a world in which winter continues to come as do the dreams. Winter, horses, dreams; fire, sex, body; birth, death, loss—every element recurs with great regularity. Each poem adding another layer of complexity and mystery to this edgy collection. Martin holds nothing back, but the thread of narrative in these autobiographical and persona lyric poems wanders and circles back upon itself as Martin relies on the Louisiana terrain for her dark settings and deep images. The beauty of these poems is as much about the swamps, bayous, and sugar cane fields as it is about Martin’s careful word choice, but her actual experience gives the book its depth. Martin becomes her own persona, so that it is impossible to determine which poems were lives and which were poetically envisioned. For purposes of review, I will refer to the “I” in the poems as Martin, although I know this is not always literally true.

Written in three parts, the book begins with section entitled “Fables of Skin,” in which Martin first appears.

I am the woman
naked before the mirror
... haunted.
 (“Naked”)

In the same poem, she describes her heart as “calloused” and the red roses, which she is “slav[ing]... / lopping,” as having “iron tongues.” She burns her “bridal veil” at “midnight,” dreams “secret dreams—sexless, loveless.” She craves more than a “morning tryst” can offer. “I crave you—” she says. (“Naked”) Who is you? is a question with no easy answer.

The woman wants that which is lost. And to remember that sex can be defined as the “little death” is to follow her into visions, nightmares and dreams. She

...brews
a hurricane
in her bed
...makes love
as the gumbo simmers.

...She roams
with coydogs at midnight.
 (“Any Winter Sunday in Louisiana”)

See? It is midnight again. The words are as dark and unsettling as the setting. Rain falls, making “mud of the bayou.” (“Any Winter Sunday in Louisiana”) “A field of moons” (“Tattoo”) provides only dim light. “[The Bone woman comes] to pray [among the] holy trees [of] an ancestral graveyard,” where she hears “a silence we all reject—” (“Bone Woman”) And then there’s the loneliness during which Martin shares “only the bluest of secrets” (“Blue Secret”)—the ones she “hear[s] in [her] inmost mind.” (“What the Water Gave Me”) She is pregnant with her son; she “want[s] sleep...[but] someone remembers [her] sins.” (“Blue Secret”) Martin does not hint at who remembers and accuses? At her son’s birth “in the white sun of the room,” nurses rush about with a “fetal heart monitor” and the doctor “pierces a hole in the universe.” (“Birthing”) Martin lets readers know a secret exists—one that is “buried, never spoken.” (“Girl Running With Horses”)

In the second section, “A Fire of Words,” the poems become noisier. Martin longs for quiet, her frail boy, born to a world where “death can come as a whisper...He will always be frail.” (“Premature”) A daughter follows—“born in winter.” (“To a Daughter Born in Winter”) A stillborn appears in an ekphrasitic poem, “Room of Memory.” Then her son dies. We do not know how long he has lived.

Circled in ice, you’re enwrapped in white fire...

Your pulse beeps loss. I buzz a nurse out of the void....

I cannot watch you die....

The undertaker powders the fine
hairs of your face, seals you in secret.
 (“Ice To Water”)

More secrets. It is winter; horses are starving; Martin must let her grief go. But losing a child is never easy, and Martin must fight for her own survival. She fights by writing these poems.

That death is our singular future gives [her] peace.

Assured the moon will still pull these gulf waves
even when no one is left living.
 (“Scattering Ashes into the Gulf of Mexico”)

In the final section, “All That We Conjure,” Martin searches for resolution. She “beg[s] the leaves / not to fall,” (“Winter”) but “find[ing] the child’s skeleton” (“Punishment”) sends her into “a fever dance.” (“Winter”); this is punishment. But punishment for what? Secrets still. She plays her guitar, because “[h]er body desires / the instrument.” (“Her Body Desires the Instrument”) Again she grows roses whose thorns “bit[e] her hands / fe[e]d on her blood.” (“Cutting”) Add blood to her dark images.

And then, love. The sun does begin to shine, but the “unrequited / lusts” that “will be relinquished,” still make for a world in which

We become too alive...

until what is
unknowable

pierces us—
("These Private Hours")

What a lovely, mystical image. "What is / unknowable" must be divine. But the story doesn't end here. The poet is awake through her insomnia, crying for the light.

Illuminate the dark room of my heart.
Pierce it with suns—
("Beloved")

Is it God to Whom she cries? In dreams, the sea is her refuge. And still,

We marry into grief
and the poems pile....

Secrets hold to us
("Muse")

The images now become both light and dark. "[A]ll things green die," Martin writes. ("Father Almost Drowning") Then Martin is

...kept by crows.
[who] beckon out of sleep,

calling come, come
be transformed....

A crow told [Martin]:

Let me be a whorl or darkness—
Let me be a fist in the sun."
("Haunted")

Few poets make the argument for living "the writing life" as poignantly as Clare L. Martin does in her book, *Eating the Heart First*. One of the strongest poetry books I have read in years, this stellar book is the product of a difficult life lived and shared. I give it six out of five stars and suggest readers move it to the top of their reading lists. Clare L. Martin will not disappoint you. You will read this book again and again.

Martin is a fist, indeed. A fist in the sun!